



The Water Column

by Diane Daubton

As nature puts on a snowy carpet and wildlife are adopting winter survival strategies, a diverse network of resource professionals have put away their waders, binocs, sprayers, nets, and snorkels, to begin their winter season. Post-field season is an important time to network with others engaged in resource management. One such local collaboration is the Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area (NCWMA), a diverse and active group serving our neck of the woods. Members of NCWMA include state and federal agencies, tribes, local towns, community associations, non-profit organizations, lake associations, or individuals interested in combatting invasive species in the region. Their name, while a bit confusing, reflects a rich history of battling “weeds” from the old days of noxious weed control on rangeland, to the roots of CWMA’s in western states.

Old Time Radio lovers ...fancy an episode of the beloved Lone Ranger and his trusty sidekick Tonto duking it out. Fists and bullets are flying to rid the range of villains plotting to spread spotted knapweed or leafy spurge – noxious weeds infecting their “home on the range”.

The first Cooperative Weed Management Area in the nation was actually formed in 1990 in response to a major wildfire that affected rangeland near Yellowstone Park in the late ‘80s. According to Katherine Howe, Coordinator at the Midwest Invasive Plant Network, “Land managers were concerned that the burned areas would be vulnerable to invasive plants, and they created the (*Greater Yellowstone*) CWMA to coordinate strategy for prevention and control.” Nowadays, the Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area (NCWMA) has adopted and localized the western weed cooperative model to serve the Northwoods. They tap into agency expertise and collaborate to protect a variety of rural landscapes including agriculture, roadways, municipalities, lakeshores, rivers, and wetlands...all places under siege from invasive species.

The group is coordinated by Pamela Roberts, who serves as chief, cook, and bottle-washer, but it is her love of botany that brings out her true passion. She’s especially gratified with recent progress in helping the City of Bayfield control giant knotweed, a towering, bamboo-like invasive plant that forms dense hedges up to 20 feet in height. Neighbors had shared the unique looking plant, inadvertently causing it to spread to nearby ravines. By the way, giant knotweed is not currently widespread in Wisconsin and is listed as “prohibited” under the State’s Invasive Species Rule (NR 40), meaning that the species cannot be transported, possessed, transferred, or introduced.

It’s smaller (but still huge and hedge-like) distant cousin, Japanese knotweed, also has been showing up in ravines, roadsides, and backyard gardens. Japanese knotweed is “restricted”, rather than “prohibited”, but it poses the same problems, literally taking over yards and neighboring areas, especially threatening riparian and wetland areas. This past year, Pamela’s group helped Bayfield County to coordinate *Knotweed Knockout* events, controlling infested areas and sharing information through educational forums and one-on-one contacts with landowners.

Both giant knotweed and Japanese knotweed are known to increase soil erosion along streambanks and ravines. Plants are easily spread when rhizomes or small root fragments are transported downstream or when soil containing fragments is disturbed. Both invasive knotweeds can be allelopathic (they exude chemical compounds toxic to native vegetation), and Japanese and giant knotweed can hybridize forming lookalike stands. The good news...these huge hedge-like plants are easily spotted even after the snow falls. Look for tall thick patches of dry erect tan or reddish-brown hollow stems. Stems are smooth and arching with twigs that zigzag from node to node, sometimes with finger-like projections near the terminal ends, remnant stems from late-summer flowers.

Some additional NCWMA partner projects include working to identify and control other wetland and shoreland invasive species such as the non-native subspecies of *Phragmites*, recently found at 31 locations around Chequamegon Bay and one location in Douglas County. The group also manages an aquatic invasive species boat wash project to help prevent the spread of aquatic invaders, and helps maintain restored shorelands along the Hwy 2 corridor, as part of the Ashland Shoreland Restoration Demonstration Project.

More good news...Pamela and other partners at NCWMA continue to offer technical help and treatment options to landowners. If you suspect a patch of knotweed (or other invasive plants) on your property, you can tap into the NCWMA's tool shed to borrow equipment you may need, or tap into the expertise of an organization empowered by collaboration and motivated to help keep invasive plants from getting a foothold in the Northwoods. The group holds many events throughout the year, from plant identification trainings, to community work days.

For links to fact sheets and photos of both types of knotweed check out DNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/> or look for upcoming events, newsletters, and project updates on the NCWMA website at <http://www.northwoodscwma.org/>. To learn more about the Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area, Pamela can be reached at PROberts@bayfieldcounty.org or call 715-373-6167.

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